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ARCENT FOR LT GEN WHITCOMB
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CENTCOM ALSO FOR MAJ GEN FINDLEY, REYES, RODRIGUEZ
NSC FOR NRAMCHAND, EABRAMS

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TAGS: PREL PTER PARM MOPS MARR IR IZ AF LE AE
SUBJECT: UAE SCENE SETTER FOR GENERAL WHITCOMB

REF: A) ABU DHABI 1595 (ADMIRAL FALLON WITH MBZ)
B) SECDEF 31828 (AUGUST 2 VISIT)

Classified by Ambassador Michele Sison, reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (S) General Whitcomb: Embassy Abu Dhabi welcomes you for what we understand will be your final visit to the UAE in your current capacity. As you are aware, deepening ties with the UAE is all about relationships, and we appreciate the effort you have made to keep your UAE counterparts engaged on U.S. goals and operations in the region. Your meetings during this visit will help forge even stronger ties. You will present the Order of St. Barbers to Land Forces Commander Staff MG Ali Mohammed Subeih al-Kaabi and discuss with him recent, current and future engagement opportunities with ARCENT such as the Aviation Seminar, Artillery Seminar, Land Forces Component Commander conference, etc. Your potential meeting with the UAE Chief of Defense, Staff LTG Hamad Mohammed Thani al-Rumaithy, will be an opportunity to encourage ever-deepening engagement with the UAE Land Forces.

UAE Cooperation

¶2. (S) The U.S. enjoys strong defense cooperation with the UAE, working together in key aspects of the war on terror; the UAE has Special Operations troops on the ground in Afghanistan and has been a source of security assistance for Lebanon and the Palestinian Authority, in addition to assisting virtually every trouble spot in the region in need of reconstruction support. The nation provides critical basing and over-flight for U.S. reconnaissance and refueling assets, extensive naval logistics support, and the Navy's liberty port of choice in the region (425 ships annually). We suggest that you thank your UAE interlocutors for their strong support for the U.S. Air Force and Navy in the UAE and encourage continued partnership in Afghanistan and elsewhere in the region. A few quantitative measures of bilateral cooperation include:

--- 1,600 USAF personnel at Al Dhafra Air Base;
--- a vigorous training schedule at the Gulf Air Warfare Center at Al Dhafra;
--- the F-16 Block 60 program;
--- approximately 425 port visits last year;
--- over 24,000 US military overflights/landings in 2006;
--- more than 150,000 U.S. servicemen and women enjoying liberty annually in the UAE; and

--- 180 UAE Special Operations forces currently serving with the Coalition in Afghanistan;
--- 150 conventional ground forces with South African built armored personnel carriers are planned to deploy in support of OEF, to work directly with Canadian forces.

¶ 13. (S) These contributions are significant in scope but also enduring in their continuity over a number of years. The ports of Jebel Ali and Fujairah are vital to U.S. Navy interdiction operations, re-supply and sustainment, and combat support efforts across the region. Jebel Ali in Dubai has hosted more port visits for each of the past three years than any other port outside the United States. In expressing appreciation for this outstanding partnership, you might also emphasize with GHQ officials that the evolving nature of military requirements mandates an ongoing focus on joint planning, coordination, and strategic interoperability.

¶ 14. (S) In spite of differences on status of forces issues and the use of passports/visas versus military IDs/orders for UAE entry and exit, overall mil-to-mil cooperation with the UAE has been excellent, with consistently reliable support at Jebel Ali and Fujairah ports and at Al Dhafra Air Base. We recently moved routine military cargo flight operations from UAE civil airports in the northern Emirates to the Minhad air station, in accordance with a UAE request. The request enhances force protection considerations but comes with a one-time cost of approximately \$4.5 million. Minhad is generally better positioned geographically to support CENTCOM needs. In very limited circumstances when a C-5 is required to land at Fujairah, the UAE has granted all requested clearances.

Iraq

¶ 15. (S) While the UAE has offered some political and economic support for Iraq and identifies Iraqi stability as a regional priority, the UAE's (all-Sunni) leadership has over the past several months exhibited a hardened attitude toward Prime Minister al-Maliki, perceiving him as beholden to Iran and incapable of moving beyond sectarian bias to lead a unified Iraq. The UAE has in the past favored former Prime Minister Ayad Allawi and has stalled on its commitment to relieve Iraqi debt (of \$3.5 billion) in order to avoid al-Maliki claiming credit. The UAE has expressed concern over the continued violence and chaos in and around Baghdad as well as the failure of the al-Maliki government to improve overall security in the country.

¶ 16. (S) Meanwhile, the UAE has been engaged in regional efforts to facilitate reconciliation between Sunni and Shi'a forces. The UAEG has frequently expressed alarm regarding Iranian influence in Iraq, and has made attempts to reach out to moderate Shi'a to encourage their engagement in the Iraqi political process independently of Iran. The UAE values and seeks reassurance of continued close consultation on U.S. plans and strategy involving Iraq (and Iran). As for its direct consultations with Baghdad, Iraqi National Security Adviser Muwaffaq al-Rubaie was in Abu Dhabi in late June, a visit during which the UAE leadership apparently sensed that al-Rubaie took the attitude that current UAE outreach actions in Iraq were hostile and indirectly justified Iranian counter-influence. Al-Rubaie reportedly focused his efforts on urging the Emiratis not to support the Iraqi Sunnis. The UAE sent a team to Baghdad in August to explore options for re-opening its Embassy. The UAE has not maintained diplomatic staff in Baghdad since the May 2006 kidnapping of one of its diplomats.

Iran

¶ 17. (S) Senior UAE officials often stress that Iran is the country's most serious and long-term threat, a theme we hear repeated often in UAE defense circles (but not a theme we hear from the more business-oriented leadership of Dubai). The UAE defense leadership, headed by Abu Dhabi Crown Prince and Deputy Supreme Commander of the UAE Armed Forces Mohammed bin Zayed (MbZ), is eager to establish a defensive architecture against Iranian missiles and has submitted a number of FMS requests in that regard (see paragraphs 11-12). Nonetheless, the UAE leadership has also told us they are not in a position to sacrifice \$16 billion in annual trade with Iran, while realizing that this same neighbor and major trading partner is also a

potential threat to the UAE. It is worth recalling that the May 10-12 visit of Vice President Cheney to the UAE was immediately followed by a one-night stopover by Iranian President Ahmadinejad, who was given a red carpet welcome and delivered a defiant anti-U.S. speech at a Dubai sports arena during his stay.

¶8. (S) Iran is the large neighbor that will not go away, so the UAE feels a need to engage (particularly on the economic side and especially in Dubai) with a potential foe in this rough and unforgiving neighborhood. While assisting our mission in the region, the UAE leadership has consistently pursued a cautious, non-confrontational public posture towards Iran. In the past the UAE has been hesitant to participate in certain military exercises designed to show a strong defensive front against Iran. The UAE did, however, send observers to Leading Edge 07 in October 2006 in the Gulf, which had a Proliferation Security Initiative theme. The decision to host Eagle Resolve 2008, with a Theater Air and Missile Defense theme, should be seen as a praiseworthy step. Iran is an adversary to prepare defenses against, which the UAE is doing, yet it considers economic engagement one of those defenses.

Afghanistan

¶9. (S) While the UAE has contributed up to 250 Special Operations troops to the Coalition effort in Afghanistan, it has not yet publicly acknowledged this participation. The UAE pursues Afghanistan reconstruction aid with an emphasis on road networks, mosques, medical facilities and schools and has made efforts at political mediation between Pakistan and Afghanistan. In January 2007 LTG Eikenberry escorted Afghan Armed Forces Chief of Staff General Bismillah Mohammadi Khan to Abu Dhabi in a bid to deepen direct engagement between the UAE and Afghanistan. The UAE Armed Forces Chief of Staff declared himself willing to help in any way possible, including training Afghan troops. UAE subsequently disbursed another \$30 million in general assistance and is renovating two runways in Afghanistan for military use. During the June visit of Afghan Defense Minister Wardak to Abu Dhabi, MbZ agreed to donate ten Mi-17 helicopters to Kabul. One of MbZ's oft-stated interests in sending Emirati Special Ops troops to Afghanistan is to get his military forces "bloodied" and battle-hardened so they may effectively confront imported or domestic extremism when called upon to do so back home. The UAE contribution in Afghanistan warrants our frequent expressions of appreciation.

Elsewhere in the region

¶10. (S) The UAE provides significant humanitarian and security assistance to Lebanon; on August 2 MbZ spoke with SecDef at some length about the need to bolster Lebanon's ability to stand against Syrian influence. The UAE has been at the forefront of reconstruction efforts, continuing a longstanding de-mining operation, and contributing resources for school construction and hospitals. UAE Air Force C-130s and helicopters have been used in relief efforts. The UAE has also provided UAE-manufactured pistols (Caracal) and ammunition to the LAF. Earlier in the summer the UAE Foreign Minister had a conversation with Lebanese PM Siniora on a proposal for a Muslim force for Lebanon (under UN mandate). The UAE seeks to strengthen the Siniora government, having delivered \$300 million in assistance to Lebanon this year, while also seeking limited engagement with Syria (to include a mid-July visit by UAE President Sheikh Khalifa bin Zayed Al Nahyan and a donation of \$10 million towards the support of Iraqi refugees and \$100 million to build a hospital in Syria).

¶11. (S) The UAE would like to see tangible progress on the Middle East Roadmap, rejects the Hamas agenda, and continues to support the Palestinian people through more than \$400 million in housing and humanitarian assistance since 2000. MbZ and his brothers, Foreign Minister Abdullah and National Security Advisor/State Security Director Hazza, are in close contact with President Mahmoud Abbas and Prime Minister Salam Fayyad. As the result of the May 2007 visit of USSC General Dayton, the UAE transferred \$80 million to the Palestinian president.

Weapons packages -- high UAE expectations

¶12. (S) The UAE has committed billions to current and anticipated Foreign Military Sales cases, in addition to over \$8.5 billion in direct commercial sales in the Block 60 F-16 program, one of the premier security assistance portfolios in the region. At the invitation of the Pentagon and State Department to deepen the security relationship by cooperating on an integrated missile defense shield, the UAE has recently submitted Letters of Request on the Patriot (nine PAC-3/GEM-T batteries), Surface Launched Advanced Medium Range Air-to-Air Missile (SL-AMRAAM, eight fire units), and Theater High Altitude Air Defense (THAAD) system (3 fire units), for an estimated total value of \$13 to 20 billion. It is now incumbent upon the USG to make good on our offer of enhanced engagement by pressing for expeditious Congressional notification this fall (pressing at every opportunity for favorable results in any congressional review of the weapons package). The UAE will see our posture as a critical measure of USG willingness to truly stand by the UAE in a contingency involving Iran.

¶13. (S) The UAE recently signed the High Mobility Artillery Rocket System (HIMARS) Letter of Offer and Acceptance for a counter battery, a case valued at \$597M. Both Boeing and Northrop-Grumman have provided Requests for Information on an Airborne Early Warning and Control aircraft later this year. The UAE has also submitted a Letter of Request for purchase of three E2-C Hawkeye AEW&C aircraft as an interim solution until delivery of a more permanent AEW&C platform. (Note: That decision is expected in mid-2008. End note.)

The UAE has also made a request to buy 40 UH-60 Blackhawk helicopters for its Special Operations Command. They have already signed the Letter of Offer and Acceptance for 26 Blackhawks, plus a training package, a case valued at \$807M. They have also purchased 10 Blackhawks via Direct Commercial Sales from Sikorsky. The UAE is upgrading its AH-64 Apache helicopters to the "D" (LONGBOW) model and has requested 1300 Hellfire missiles with the expectation of a request for an additional 1200 missiles. Three separate Letters of Request for additional weapons for their F-16s have been received, valued at over \$800M. (The current UAE portfolio of active cases handled by USLO stands at 44 cases, valued at just over \$4 billion with another \$1.56 billion in cases under development, most of which are expected to be signed by the end of the calendar year. These figures do not include the \$13-20 billion for the missile defense requests or \$1-3 billion estimated for the AEW&C platform.)

¶14. (S) One challenge facing the UAE is its shortage of trained personnel to operate many of the requested systems. With a total population of approximately 800,000 Emirati nationals, of which roughly half are women, and only half of the males are adults, the pool from which recruits are sought for the UAE Armed Forces is relatively small. While the profession of arms and police work are traditional and respected occupations in the UAE, the more affluent families tend to view service in the armed forces as less attractive than private sector work. Identifying sufficient personnel to maintain complex defense systems presents an ongoing challenge. The UAE faces a huge challenge with English language training for military personnel, particularly in support areas. In addition, Third Party Transfer issues prohibit third country nationals from performing many of these vital but more menial tasks. It has been rumored that the UAE Land Forces have requested an increase in overall strength in order to help address the staffing issue. It would be worthwhile to attempt to draw out MG Ali al-Kaabi on this issue during the course of your conversation. Congratulating the UAE on its signing of the HIMARS LoA and the on-track upgrade of their Apaches to the Longbow version is also recommended.

Keeping the relationship strong

¶15. (S) The UAE's reliable and enduring support for mutual military interests in the region creates both a sense of momentum in the relationship and high expectations on the part of our hosts. The UAE leadership is always looking for senior USG endorsement of our partnership in the form of ongoing consultations on U.S. intentions in the region (particularly Iraq and Iran, but also Afghanistan and Lebanon). The UAE will also be interested in an honest sense of the congressional mood in terms of weapons sales in the region (keeping in mind that the UAE seeks congressional notification, which appears to be on track, of its systems this fall and notification to be handled separately from any other nation, GCC or otherwise). An

expression of genuine appreciation for the UAE role in the region is also recommended.

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